

February 1, 2021

Chicago Police Board
2 North LaSalle Street
Suite M800
Chicago, IL 60602

Members: President Ghian Foreman, Vice President Paula Wolff, Secretary and Chief Administrative Officer Max A. Caproni, Matthew C. Crowl, Rev. Michael Eaddy, Steve Flores, Jorge Montes, John P. O'Malley Jr., Andrea Zopp, Rhoda D. Sweeney

cc: Mayor Lori Lightfoot

Members of the Chicago Police Board,

On behalf of 78 Illinois and national civil rights, community and religious organizations, we urge you to swiftly act on the charges filed with your office by the Superintendent of Police to discharge Police Officer John Catanzara Jr., (Star No. 19897) for violating the rules of conduct he is sworn to uphold as a member of the Chicago Police Department (CPD). These 18 charges amount to 72 violations of the Rules and Regulations of the Chicago Police Department and we believe his swift removal is necessary to ensure the safety of all Chicagoans.¹

Among the 18 charges, the Superintendent cited a social media post in which Catanzara referred to Muslims as "savages" who "all deserve a bullet."² When asked to apologize for this statement by members of Chicago's Muslim community, he responded by referencing a graphic anti-Muslim trope about mutilating genitals and declaring "I could really give a damn what they think."³

The Chicago police serves a large, diverse population that includes a robust American Muslim community. The stated mission of the CPD is "to protect the lives, property, and rights of all people, to maintain order, and to enforce the law impartially. We will provide quality police service in partnership with other members of the community."⁴ Catanzara's statements about Muslims strongly suggest that he is not able to afford impartial justice to all people in Chicago and in partnership with community members. Rather, his social media posts suggest that he enforces the law in accordance with his bigoted views, in which Muslims are unequal to, and less deserving than, other communities. Because Catanzara holds a leadership position in the Chicago Fraternal Order of Police, his public statements degrading Muslims also impairs the ability of CPD as a whole to enforce the law impartially and in partnership with community members.⁵

Catanzara's statements are entirely consistent with his entire career with the CPD. In addition to his recent troubling defense of an insurrection in Washington, D.C., he's amassed at least 35 complaints of misconduct and multiple suspensions during his shameful tenure and a record of

bigotry, sexism, and hostility toward Chicagoans from a wide range of backgrounds.⁶ One complaint from one of Catanzara's former commanders asserted that he has called for the murdering of college students and defaming Muslims, women, people who participate in social programs, and people who disagree with him politically.⁷

He has responded to past attempts to hold him accountable with a deep hostility toward the rule of law, stating "The police dept didn't and CAN'T fire me," and that he "don't really care" about official complaints and investigations into his conduct.⁸

It is abundantly clear that Catanzara's record of unprofessionalism, hateful rhetoric and calls for killing people disqualify him from serving as a police officer. But we are also concerned about the need to ensure that the process for assessing the evidence of Catanzara's lack of fitness to serve as a police officer is not influenced by Catanzara's position as president of Chicago's largest police union or the culture that has permitted him to persist despite expressing bigoted views that suggest his inability to afford impartial justice to residents of Chicago. For example, Mayor Lightfoot has declined to condemn Catanzara's call to kill all Muslims, even though she has rightly condemned him for other statements, including his recent defense of an attempted insurrection in Washington, D.C.¹⁰

Should the Police Board fail to swiftly discharge Catanzara, it will send the unmistakable message to the rest of law enforcement and the City of Chicago that naked bigotry and calls to murder people—expression that suggests a police officer cannot ensure fair and impartial policing—are entirely acceptable. The Chicago Police Department already has an extraordinary and troubling record of violence against Black and Brown communities, including:

- Killing Black people at a rate greater than any other metropolitan region in the entire nation.¹¹
- Using force against Black Chicagoans at a rate of 14 times greater than white people.¹²
- A pattern of excessive force against communities of color and people with disabilities that gave rise to a scathing U.S. Department of Justice report on CPD use of force,¹³ an Illinois Attorney General lawsuit against the City of Chicago,¹⁴ two separate lawsuits by numerous community organizations against the City of Chicago,¹⁵ and a consent decree that requires large-scale transformation of CPD policies, training, and practices.¹⁶
- Even under the court-ordered Consent Decree, the Department has missed 70 percent of its required deadlines for reform.¹⁷

A man like Catanzara patrolling the streets of Chicago with a gun and impunity is a threat to the safety of all Chicagoans. That's why it is vital that the Chicago Police Board protect the people of Chicago by swiftly discharging him and that all city officials make clear that hostility, racism, and overt calls to kill people based on their religion have no place in CPD.

Please reach out to Scott Simpson at scott@muslimadvocates.org, Sufyan Sohel at ssohel@cair.com, Nusrat Jahan Choudhury at NChoudhury@aclu-il.org and Dr. Dilara Sayeed at dilara@ilmuslimciviccoalition.org for further discussions about this matter.

Sincerely,

Muslim Advocates, Convener

CAIR-Chicago, Convener

ACLU of Illinois, Convener

Illinois Muslim Civic Coalition, Convener

Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIGOC), Convener

CHICAGO AND ILLINOIS ORGANIZATIONS

32nd Ward United

48th Ward Neighbors for Justice

Action for a Better Tomorrow Sauk Valley

ADL Midwest

AIDS Foundation Chicago

Americans for Democratic Action Illinois Chapter (ADA)

BYP 100 Chicago Chapter

Center on Halsted

Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE)

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Chicago Mosque

Communities United

Community Renewal Society

DRIVE 45th Ward

Ephraim Bahar cultural Center (EBCC)

Equality Illinois

Equip for Equality

Faith First Project

Good Trouble Coalition

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

Indivisible Brookfield

Indivisible Chicago

Indivisible Chicago-South Side

Indivisible IL9 Andersonville - Edgewater

Indivisible Illinois

Indivisible South Suburban Chicago (ISSC)

Indivisible Western Springs

Islamic Center of Naperville

Islamic Society of Greater Springfield

JACL Chicago

Jewish Voice for Peace - Chicago Chapter
Lambda Legal, Midwest Region
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
March For Our Lives Illinois
Masjid Al-Taqwa
MMUSA
Nikkei Uprising
NWSOFA Indivisible
ONE Northside
Peoples Church of Chicago
Save Our Southland
The Roosevelt Network at UIC
Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois (UUANI)
Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association - Chicagoland Cluster
Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of Illinois
University of Illinois Chicago National Lawyers Guild

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

50 Miles More
American Atheists
American Muslim Bar Association
American Muslim Community Foundation
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism-California State University, San Bernardino
Color of Change
Faith in Public Life
ICNA Council for Social Justice
Interfaith Center of New York
Japanese American Citizens League
Justice for Women COVID-19 Task Force
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
MediaJustice
MUHSEN
Muslim American Society
Muslims for Liberty
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Sikh Coalition
Sonia Shah Organization
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
US Human Rights Network

Youth Over Guns

1. Superintendent of Police David Brown. "Charges against police officer John Catanzara." January 26, 2021, <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cpb/PoliceDiscipline/21PB2987Charges.pdf>.
2. Superintendent of Police David Brown. "Charges against police officer John Catanzara." January 26, 2021, <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cpb/PoliceDiscipline/21PB2987Charges.pdf>.
3. Steve Miller. "Chicago police union president under fire for anti-Muslim social media posts." *WBBM Newsradio*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.radio.com/wbbm780/news/local/cpd-union-prez-under-fire-for-anti-muslim-social-media-posts>.
4. Chicago Police Department. "Chicago Police Department Mission." https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cpd/auto_generated/cpd_mission.html
5. We fully support the First Amendment right of public employees—including police officers—to speak in their private capacities on matters of public concern. As the Supreme Court has recognized, however, those rights must be balanced against "the interest of the State, as an employer, in promoting the efficiency of the public services it performs through its employees." *Pickering v. Board of Ed. of Township High School Dist. 205, Will Cty.*, 391 U.S. 563, 568 (1968). When the speech of a police officer brings the "mission of the employer and the professionalism of its officers into serious disrepute," *Borough of Duryea, Pa. v. Guarnieri*, 564 U.S. 379, 390 (2011), the employer may take appropriate disciplinary action.
6. Jeremy Gornier. "New police union President John Catanzara rode a wave of controversy to popularity with fellow officers." *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/criminal-justice/ct-fop-president-catanzara-profile-20200513-x4e37d4gijadbjacvc2x55shau-story.html>.
7. Jodi S. Cohen. "Chicago cop under investigation again over social media posts." *ProPublica*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.propublica.org/article/chicago-police-officer-john-catanzara-investigation>.
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11. Tim Stelloh. "Chicago metro area tops list in study of racial inequities in police killings." *NBC News*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/chicago-metro-area-tops-list-study-racial-inequities-police-killing-s-n1231953>.
12. Andrew Fan. "Chicago police are 14 times more likely to use force against young Black men than against whites." *The Intercept*, August 16, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/16/chicago-police-misconduct-racial-disparity/>.
13. U.S. Department of Justice. "Justice Department Announces Findings of Investigation into Chicago Police Department." January 13, 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-findings-investigation-chicago-police-department#:~:text=The%20Justice%20Department%20announced%20today,Fourth%20Amendment%20of%20the%20Constitution>.
14. Illinois Attorney General. "Attorney General Madigan files lawsuit against City of Chicago to obtain consent decree for police reform." August 29, 2017, https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/pressroom/2017_08/20170829.html.

15. ACLU Illinois. "ACLU sues for police reform in Chicago." October 4, 2017, <https://www.aclu-il.org/en/press-releases/aclu-sues-police-reform-chicago>; Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center. "Landmark class action lawsuit filed against the City of Chicago alleging racially discriminatory policing and violent abuse." June 14, 2017, <https://www.macarthurjustice.org/landmark-class-action-lawsuit-filed-against-the-city-of-chicago-alleging-racially-discriminatory-policing-and-violent-police-abuse/>.
16. Chicago Police Consent Decree website, <http://chicagopoliceconsentdecree.org/>; Illinois Attorney General. "Chicago Police Department Consent Decree." January 31, 2019, <http://chicagopoliceconsentdecree.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Consent-Decree-Fact-Sheet-Jan-31-2019.pdf>.
17. Shelby Bremer. "Chicago police missed more than 70% of deadlines in first year of consent decree." *NBC Chicago*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-politics/chicago-police-missed-more-than-70-of-deadlines-in-first-year-of-consent-decree-report-says/2292222/>.